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The teacher of literature can help children become aware of and sensitive to the world around them--its beauty, good, and evil. In teaching poetry, the teacher must choose poems he likes, read them aloud to the students, lead class discussions about student reactions to poems, and allow students to write and to memorize poetry for enjoyment. The teaching of drama should proceed from miming, charades, and one-act plays to full-length plays. Prose should be taught to be enjoyed, to make children conversant with a wide range of books, and to allow them to formulate moral concepts of the world around them. Although examinations cannot test sensitivity to literature, they are valid teaching devices and can measure interest, enthusiasm, and breadth of reading. Tests can require students to evaluate critically a poem that they have not studied. In addition, tests can become increasingly more thorough as the children advance in school, proceeding from questions requiring simple descriptions of a character to more complex delineations of the central theme of a book. (JS)

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An Approach to the Teaching and the Examining of Literature in the Junior Secondary School

(An Address given at Armidale Teachers' College Post-College Courses, September, 1967)

By J. W. Farley, B.A., B.Ed., High School, Quirindi, N.S.W.

Since my topic is concerned with Literature in the Junior Secondary School, I propose to deal with the teaching of Literature in First, Second, Third and Fourth Forms particularly, and also to submit some observations about the examining of Literature in these Forms. Literature, its enjoyment and the teaching of it, is a very personal matter, and what I say must be interpreted within the framework of this remark.

Literature, to me, is the store-house (those accumulated treasures, as Winston Churchill put it) of experience, and it is one of the means by which we, as teachers, can extend the child's emotional and intellectual experience by introducing him vicariously to differing patterns of emotional, intellectual and social behaviour. Now, I do not think that the world's problems can be solved by a study of literature—but I earnestly and sincerely believe that, by extending children's experiences through literature, we can extend their enjoyment of living.

The study of poetry, drama and prose in the Junior Secondary School is not an isolated study. It is part of a continuing process which begins in the kindergarten (even earlier at the parents' knee) and extends into the Senior School and beyond. As teachers generally, and as teachers of literature in particular, we must attempt to aid this development in as orderly and natural a manner as possible so that gradually, almost imperceptibly, the children become aware of, and sensitive to, the world about them, to the beauty that lies at every hand, to the good and the evil which prevail throughout the world.

I am aware that we battle against almost overwhelming odds in the classroom. Time, the impending examinations, indifference to literature, indiscipline, intrude upon our attempts to develop sensitivity. But, because we are aware of these obstructions and their detrimental influence, we are in a position of advantage to meet them actively. In a world where the giants of mathematics and science are threatening to engulf us, we must, like the tide, by persistent, regular and quiet action, continue to exert our influence directly and indirectly upon the children who pass through our hands. By setting our sights high, we may achieve more than we anticipate.

I have stressed the word "sensitivity" in my introduction, and it is through poetry that we grope towards greater sensitivity to the beauty, to the colour, to the aroma, to the landscape about us. In poetry, we are attempt ing to please, to inspire. We appeal to the emotions as well as to the intellect and we hope to make that appeal through enjoyment. In encouraging enjoyment, the teacher is the key to that enjoyment. Through him, the essence of enjoyment, of appreciation, is distilled. In the first place, he selects the poem. He selects poems which he feels will suit the interests of the children within his group. One of the greatest blessings of the Wyndham Scheme lies in the fact that now the more sensitive and the less sensitive can be brought together in their own groups to the greater advantage of both groups.

The teacher must discriminate carefully in the choice of the poem because this first meeting is important. The presentation must be pitched at the child's (or indeed the class's) intellectual, emotional and aesthetic level of development. Care must be taken that we do not summarily foist our opinions and tastes upon the children. Often, particularly in the very junior years, a poem can be read for enjoyment, solely for the emotional appeal without any explanation whatsoever.

After the poem has been selected, the teacher must pay attention to preparing the audience. Necessary information should be given, but this does not need to be at length or in depth. If we spend too much time on this step, the audience will only grow bored and indiscipline could result. The next step, and to my mind the most important step, is the reading of the poem. It is the teacher's responsibility to read the poem as if he enjoys the poem. If the teacher has free choice of the poem, he should not read to a class any poem which he cannot pretend to enjoy. If the poem has been chosen by external examiners, then the teacher should attempt to find some enjoyment in it. Unfortunately, children all too often copy our attitudes, and if we by tone or look seem not to enjoy the poem then they will, instinctively almost, reject the poem.

Read the poem, then, as if you really enjoy it, remembering always that poems were meant to be read aloud. Try to make this intial reading a pleasurable experience, for on this experience they will accept or reject the poem—and what is worse, on a series of bad readings, reject all poetry. I always remember some advice I was given long ago, that we do not teach poetry: we merely bring the child and poetry together. And this first reading is intended primarily to bring the child and poetry together.

Remembering that we aim to bring the child and poetry together, I let the children read the poem together so that they, too, may capture some of the joy of saying it. Each poem evokes a somewhat different response. Therefore, if we make our approach too stereotyped, we are tending to teach, to foist our own attitude upon them, and this is not good, because it does not then effectively bring children and poetry together.

Once the poem has been read, let the children discuss their reactions. Do not ask too many questions: it spoils the enjoyment. Technical terms arise naturally from the discussions. An effective simile, metaphor or image arouses the interest of the children. Then is the time to discover why it is effective—to discover what the comparison is; and with the better children I feel that this aspect can be reated, simply and not in too great detail, in First Form.

The music of the poem will interest them in the early years, too. It is better to find what makes the music first—to find the repetition of initial sounds, to find the repetition of vowel sounds, to find the repetition of vowel and consonant sounds together, before introducing such terms as alliteration, assonance and rhyme. I find with my better Junior classes that the introduction of these terms early, and constant reference to them, make the children sensitive to the means by which the poet achieves his effects.

Memorizing of poems is a very contentious question. If memorizing becomes a drudgery, then I know that I have failed. Inspectors sometimes want to know how much poetry the children know. I prefer them to ask how much poetry the children like. It is a matter for concern when people ask me how much poetry children know, because I feel that the facility to learn poetry by rote, worthy in itself I suppose, does not necessarily reveal any sensitivity towards poetry. I prefer children to learn a few lines which they like, and if I have done my job properly as I want to do it they will learn different lines because they like different lines in the poem.

Memorizing is painless if it is learnt perhaps by chance. Often, after we have chanted a poem, some of them find that they have a few lines of it, or a few phrases of it, and this seems to give them pleasure—they enjoy it. Many of them then attempt to learn a little more.

Writing poetry is a most worthwhile activity. But when do we get time for it? There are so many valuable things which have to be taught in our six periods per week that little time can be allotted to creative activities. For the best of our children, the creative activities are the most important, but there again I do not think that at 3.00 p.m. on Tuesday afternoon you can walk into your classroom and have all your class settle down to creative activity: it is one of those things which, unfortunately, cannot be strictly time-tabled. Nor do I think that it can be ignored.

I have stressed the choosing of the poem as of prime importance. Naturally, no strict rules can be made because each group will be slightly different. However, over the years I have followed a pattern of the following type.

In First Form I have started with the ballads, those with stirring speeches, swift action and clear personalities. "John Gilpin" and "Lochinvar" are good examples; Kipling and Newbolt represent the types of poets. Then I like to have poems which have a definite rhythm to them, such as "Tarantella", "Cargoes", "Boots", Marching Along" and the like. At this stage too, I think, the simple lyric can be introduced, but it should present a concrete and colourful picture. "When Icicles Hang on the Wall", "London Snow" are the type which I have in mind. Some of these may only be read at this stage, discussion being left to the later years. In addition, some Australian poems should be introduced and the Australian Bush Ballads provide a rich source from which to begin.

In the Middle Years, that is in Second and Third Forms, we present a mixed type of poetry, but poetry which reflects a growing interest in music and words and discovers the children's sensitivity to carying shades of emotions. Poems such as "The Highwayman", "Naseby"—narrative poems with sound effects are good at this stage, particularly in Second Form. In Third Form we can introduce longer poems, "The Ancient Mariner", "Atalanta's Race", "Sohrab and Rustum". These poems should be read by all children passing through our classes. In addition, and most importantly, we should study at least one poet—i.e. Byron, Masefield, Slessor, Wright—by reading at least six to ten of their poems and by studying something about the poet and the period in which he wrote.

In Fourth Form, our tastes should become a little more sophisticated. We still put the emphasis on enjoyment, but we should now be able to lead the children to some appreciation of the finer qualities of poetry. Good narrative poetry will still appeal; ballads (from Percy's "Reliques"), descriptive poems will provide enjoyment. Hepple's "Lyrical Forms" provides an interesting source. Yeats, Frost, Pope, Wordsworth, Hopkins, Day Lewis, Auden, Eliot are some of the poets which can be handled at this level. Whatever poem or poet we are doing, we should endeavour to engender enjoyment, and if we do children will continue to read poetry after they leave school.

Drama should give pleasure, too. Children, even 15-year-olds and beyond, still like to act, to project themselves into another's character. This should be encouraged because it extends the emotional range of the child. In addition, plays allow us to truncate human activities and relationships—they telescope sections of human experience into manageable parts. Because it is a creative activity and because it encourages co-opera-

tion and group activity, it increases the child's emotional experience. That acting a part encourages clear speech, self-discipline, understanding, and sensitivity and trains them in self-confidence, further enhances drama as an important part of the work of the school.

Now I believe that Drama (and Speech as it is sometimes called within the Department) is such an important aspect of the work of the school that it should be done only by a specialist. We have specialist Art teachers; we have specialist Music teachers, and if we are to do justice to this important aspect of school life, we must have a special Speech teacher too. I know that many independent schools are using Speech specialists, and I hope the tendency becomes more widespread.

However, we must continue to make shift and to do our best, because the Department's tardiness in recognizing the importance of a speech specialist does not dismiss the importance of the work.

In the First Form (where we do have a little time to devote to this work) the work of the primary school must be continued. There will be formal plays, one-acters which the children will prepare for their own amusement. They enjoy fixing up costumes, making simple props, and these activities give more children a role in the finished product. However, I do feel that the informal activities are the more important. Miming (the lost 10 cents), Charades, miming ballads (Sir Patrick Spens, Sleeping Beauty, Hynd Horn) are suitable works. In this way, poetry and drama can be brought together for increased enjoyment of both.

In the Middle Years, scenes from Shakespeare, modern one-acters, can be studied. Here, with limited time, we cannot extend ourselves as we would wish. By Fourth Form, full-length plays—Shakespeare, C18th, radio plays can be studied. Always the emphasis should be on the play as a play, and for this reason I hope that the days of detailed textual study are over and that, in the future, we shall study more plays in less detail.

In the presentation of the play, remember that enjoyment is of first importance, and if we remember that the study of a play is not complete until it has been acted, however inexpertly, then we should reach a level of enjoyment for the children which will capture their interest.

As for prose, we agree that it consists of the novel, short story, romance, selections, non-fiction, the essay. Although I shall speak generally about the novel, what I say can be implicitly directed towards the other forms.

We read prose for three basic reasons, and the first is for pleasure. Therefore, we must persuade young readers, by example and through our enthusiasm, that reading is a form of enjoyment. We must choose books which suit the children's level of understanding and interest. What we choose, however, should be models of value, but must not go beyond the level or the interest of the group for which it is intended.

Secondly, we aim to make children conversant with as wide a knowledge of novels, books, stories and essays as possible. Our aim must never be to make them conversant with a particular novel; rather we want to encourage general reading and appreciation.

Thirdly, and of great importance, the novel presents a picture of the world about us, and gradually, through widening experience, allows the child to formulate moral concepts of the world about him. Arnold Zweig maintained that "a novel's purpose is to interpret life and not to allow the reader to escape from life". The novel then may be said to be a picture of life, a window through which the reader (our pupil) looks at the world in which he lives. Reading is no substitute for living, but width of reading will reveal a variety of thoughts, feelings and actions; it will give a glimpse

of periods, of societies, of manners, or morals and of human relations. All this widens the experiences of the maturing child. What we must concern ourselves with is that the widening experience which we present and the guidance we give as teachers is worthwhile.

Basically, then, we read novels for pleasure and enjoyment and to enlarge our experience. The old method of reading aloud around the class is still a worthwhile activity if we are merely concerned with teaching the rudiments of oral reading. But this type of activity has limited value in the Junior Secondary School except when we are dealing with the very lowest echelons of intelligence.

I prefer three other approaches. First, I think the teacher must read to the children. I am a firm believer in this. (If you are fortunate enough to have a good reader in the class who is competent to do what I think must be done, then by all means use him!) The teacher must understand the book, its characters and its situations. The teacher will not attempt to read the whole book, but he may read (or should I perhaps say dramatize) a good proportion of it, in an attempt to arouse interest and enthusiasm. If the class or a large body of it breathes a sigh: "That was a good book" or "That was interesting" then the teacher knows he has fulfilled his first and basic function as a teacher: he has caught the class's interest, the first step towards enthusiasm.

As an extension of this activity, the teacher may read limited selections from the novel, and at other times read selections from books in the library in an attempt to divert their attention to the library. But this merges with my third point, and I shall leave it until then.

A second approach may be to allow a private reading by the class. Such a private reading must be preceded by discussion and questions posed rather informally. Mostly this type of approach will apply to the supplementary texts. Discussion of these books will take place in the classroom, often filling in the spare five minutes at the end of a lesson. All of the children will have read different books (there are perhaps 15 to 20 different titles in each of our collections), and the aim is to make them interested enough to read as many of the supplementary readers as possible for enjoyment and not for any examination.

Thirdly, we must arouse interest in the library and its books. Discuss some of the books in the library with the class. Biggles, Zane Grey, detective stories may serve as the means of promoting interest. Encourage them to use the town library (and if you are a member of the Committee it is something of an advantage). Let the class suggest titles of books they have read and enjoyed. After a forum or discussion it is well to encourage them to name books which they have read which may be of a similar type or theme.

Naturally, we use a mixture of these three approaches, and the forums will become increasingly guided as we advance into the upper classes. Gradually, the forums will extend into discussions of technique, character, situation, setting, atmosphere, humour. Once the enthusiasm has been started, then the teacher's role becomes a guiding role. But, however much enthusiasm he has started, he should remember that he must read to them as frequently as time will permit.

I have stressed that enjoyment of literature is a main consideration in our approach to the teaching of literature. But how are we going to test this enjoyment? I do not honestly think that we can test it effectively. And I think that the examinations as they have been constituted stultify all our attempts to make children enjoy literature. The longer I teach, and

the more enjoyment I engender, the less effective appear the means of testing that enjoyment. Perhaps by the time the children reach Fourth Form they should be in a position to attempt some form of examination, but I can see no reason for testing literature as formally as we often do in the Junior classes. I thought at first that the Wyndham Report would break the strangle-hold that examinations had imposed upon us; but, to date, I have been disillusioned! I realize that those who judge my effectiveness as a teacher must have yardsticks by which they can judge my effect on the children I teach: the lines memorized from poetry, an ability to regurgitate a character study prepared with or without my dictation. Of course, there is more to the teaching of literature than this!

Such examinations as we have had, and which we still have to an extent, examine literature in depth, and this naturally restricts the width of reading, and it is this width of reading which is fundamental to my concept of teaching literature. I feel that many pupils who, in the past, gained a "B" level pass or even an "A" level pass at the old Leaving Certificate Examination passed out of school unaware that any books except the twenty or so which they had read, for examination purposes, on the passage from First to Fifth Year, existed.

The problem of examinations in general and of examining literature in particular is a vexed one. On the one hand, we have people who argue that examining literature is a form of literary prostitution; that it merely kills any real interest in literature and so must be avoided at any cost.

On the other hand, we have people who argue just as earnestly that to abandon examinations is to invite anarchy and lead directly to the annihilation of literature as a school subject, because teachers will tend to ignore any subject which is not examined and pupils will be glad to avoid what will cost them some effort. But I must confess that I have more faith in both teachers and pupils than these pessimists seem to have.

It is obvious then that both sides overstate their cases, but I feel that there is some truth in each contention. We are all aware that examinations are used as selective and predictive devices which act as incentives to the children on the one hand and controls, to an extent, on teachers on the other hand. In addition, I believe honestly that children respond to the examinations which we set in a favourable way: it is often the teachers who respond unfavourably to examinations, not the children.

It follows, then, that I think we can examine literature. I doubt if we can ever effectively test sensitivity, but we can test, to a degree, interest in and enthusiasm for literature. Examinations in the past have been irritating to many teachers because they demanded a detailed examination of the texts; and it is this testing in detail which has helped destroy interest and enthusiasm. If we must have an examination, and I see no reason why we should have one, let that examination be brief and let it test, in the Junior School at least, width of reading rather than depth of reading. In this way we will not sacrifice real enjoyment for the artificial enjoyment of passing examinations.

I am no expert in assessing validity or reliability of examinations, but over the years I have found that most pupils

(a) have a healthy respect for a test;
(b) take the test, if it is fair and they have been well prepared, in their stride;
(c) have a shrewd idea when a teacher sets too easy a paper, or teaches the questions beforehand, or gives inflated marks for inferior work;
(d) enjoy being praised: that is, by gaining marks for the work which they have done.

Therefore, I think sensible examinations can be set which, though not perfect in themselves, will satisfy both the pupil and the teacher, and, more importantly, not infringe on the real work of the teacher of bringing the child and literature together.

In First and Second Forms our examinations should be simple and should allow children to write about the books which they have read. I suggest that we set a Literature Section of one hour's duration (about half the time allotted for English examinations at this level) divided into two parts.

Part A could test width of reading. I propose setting a series of short-answer questions, each answerable in two or three sentences at the most, based on the books and poems from their general reading, their supplementary reading and from the library reading list provided by their teachers. Sufficient choice, say about six from twelve or fifteen, must be allowed to permit a divergence of reading interests. Teachers may wish to group the reading lists in certain ways so that pupils do fulfil certain minimal reading requirements. Questions should be simple, involving theme, atmosphere, mood, character, incident to see if the pupil has read the book. Answers should give the name of the work and its author. In this section I envisage that pupils could score high marks, even full marks. And I find that there is nothing wrong with this happening. In mathematics, pupils can score full marks if they know their sets and their applications; in science, they can score full marks if they know their formulae and their applications; I see no reason, then, for pupils not scoring heavily in this section, worth say 20 per cent. of the total marks for their English paper, if they have read and enjoyed their literature.

Part B would test certain works of literature, from a limited field, in greater depth. Although this field is more limited, the pupils would know the exact limits in advance of the examination. Thus, they would be prepared to write longer answers to the questions in this Part. Pupils would be required to write a description of ONE character or relate in detail ONE incident. In addition, in this Part a poem should be given at sight and the questions should be designed to test their ability to read, understand, appreciate and enjoy a poem at sight. They must be prepared to state their likes and dislikes by supplying reasons from the poem under discussion. The poetry question, in the School Certificate Examination, is a step in the right direction. We may not agree with some of the questions asked, but we must agree that the principle is a good one.

By Third Form we can increase the time allowed for testing Literature (if we have not already done so with our better classes in Second Form) to one and a half hours. By this time we can expect the better pupils to write connected and sustained comments on the books which they have read. The weaker classes may still be tested more along the lines of the suggestions made for First and Second Forms. Each teacher will know what is best for his class and will test in the way which best suits the interests of that class. However, I think that Advanced and Credit level pupils will, by Third Form, be capable and desirous of attacking a more mature type of examination.

Part A can still involve questions from a wide reading list, but I feel we ought now to impose certain restrictions. We should divide the reading lists into certain types and study certain of these groups in each of the Terms. Thus the Term's study may consist of two or three from the following groups:

(a) science fiction
(b) adventure stories—either true or fiction
(c) mystery stories

(d) historical stories
(e) social manners
(f) novels with a purpose
(g) comic novels
(h) humorous stories.

Need I continue with a list? Most teachers will devise their own lists. With the better classes, questions in Part A could be fewer and demand longer answers.

These questions could be of the following type:

1. "What do you think makes a good mystery story? Take one book which you have read this year; name it and its author; state the problem which has to be solved; comment on the way in which the problem has been solved. Do you think it is a possible solution? Give proof from the book which you have selected to prove your viewpoint."
2. Which character in your historical novels do you enjoy most? Why?
3. Which incident in your adventure stories did you find most exciting? Why?
4. Which play did you enjoy most? Why?
5. Which scene did you find most interesting in your Shakesperean play?

Now I think you will all admit that there is nothing elaborate about these questions. But, because they are general, the best of our pupils will attack them in highly individual ways, especially if they have been encouraged in the previous years to express their own viewpoints as long as those viewpoints have been backed by proof from their reading.

Part B could well be a poem or a piece of prose or both at sight for comment or appreciation. This is much along the lines of the suggestions for First and Second Forms.

Critics will say that children will still not read more than they are forced to read in order to pass the examination. They argue that, once the pattern of the examination becomes familiar, pupils will restrict their reading. Of course they will! If a teacher allows his pupils to get away with as little reading as possible, then I am sure that they will get away with it. The remedy is in the teacher's hands. If a teacher is examination-conscious in the Junior School, then he is his pupils' worst enemy. And if the pupils want to get away with as little reading as possible, then there is something very wrong with the teacher-pupil relationship. Teachers of literature should remember that they are trying to guide children's reading habits and tastes, not dictate them. A teacher who is trying to guide children will encourage them to read widely. The more widely they read, the more interested they will become in reading and the less interested they will become in the mere passing of the examination. The examination, to my mind, becomes a means not an end whilst ever the teacher directs his teaching of literature towards promoting interest and enjoyment and not towards examinations.

By Fourth Form the questions have become more mature and the answers to them have taken a certain shape. But this Fourth Form External Examination should not dominate our teaching of literature in First, Second or Third Form. In truth, it should not dominate our teaching of literature in Fourth Form, but it would be wrong not to give some training in technique during the Fourth Form.

I think that those questions which permit the pupils to write about the central theme of a book or a poem, the central characters, comparison of

character, about central incidents are the type which should be set. Some questions on certain books may become stale to the examiner who has been examining for a number of years, but it is the first time, probably, that the the past the examiner seemed to be searching for the question which had pupil has had to answer that particular question on that particular book. In the past the examiner seemed to be searching for the question which had not yet been set, and it was this evasion of the main issues by the examiner which forced teachers to highlight rather unimportant incidents or characters. This microscopic examination of trivia narrowed the width of reading in examination classes and, incidentally, erased a good deal of interest and enthusiasm.

If examiners, first of all, set a passage of prose or a poem at sight for critical evaluation with questions designed to lead the pupils to comment on the essential things in that passage or poem, then I think they will discover just how much a child knows about literature and how much he appreciates it. In addition, if the examiners set questions which try to discover the main action of the book or which try to discern such psychology of the characters, as, at the pupil's age, they can be expected to understand for themselves or how far the pupils appreciate the spirit, style and atmosphere of the work, then I think the examiners will enter into the proper spirit essential for the teaching of literature.

Needless to say, I believe that examining literature will always be a problem because teaching literature is such a personal problem. However, we must bear in mind that there are two factors involved in this problem—literature and children. Examiners must understand both if the examination of children in literature is to prove satisfactory. If the books and the pupils are properly related (and I think the examiners of the School Certificate in N.S.W. are trying to do this), and if the right type of questions are set (and here I think examiners of the S.C. are attempting a difficult task conscientiously), the examination of literature should not prove destrimental to the teaching of literature.

Now I have no doubt that this approach to the teaching and examining of literature, being so personal, will not satisfy everyone—indeed, it may satisfy no-one. It may offer no better alternative to what you are doing at present. Any method in the hands of indifferent, or insensitive, or what-you-will, teachers may soon become stereotyped and formal. With literature, and the examination of literature, I am afraid, it all comes back to the teacher. If he is enthusiastic; if he is interested; if he wants to promote interest; if he is sensitive to the literature before him, he will find a way to put it attractively before children. If not, then I am afraid there is no hope for him or for the children.

Let us hope that in our endeavours we may be inspired by the thought that

"The earth and every common sight
To me did seem apparelled in celestial light."

For if we are imaginative, if we enjoy literature, then we, as teachers, may pass some of that imagination, some of that enjoyment on to our pupils. And if we do so, then we have fulfilled our role as teachers of literature.